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Travis County District Attorney Rosemary Lehmborg today announced that Gulf Chemical and Metallurgical Corporation has paid fines totaling \$2,750,000 as part of a plea agreement with the Freeport, Texas based company. In addition to the fines, the company has one year to make significant improvements in its operations or face additional prosecutions.

Gulf Chemical, which recycles metals from spent catalysts, pled guilty to eleven counts of unlawfully discharging pollutants into state waters. Under the Texas Water Code, each violation can result in a maximum fine of \$250,000.

The convictions are a culmination of the collaborative efforts of the District Attorney's newly formed Environmental Crimes Unit, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's Environmental Crimes Unit, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division. A search warrant was executed on the company in February of this year.

The District Attorney's unit was created last year in partnership with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Their work has produced impressive results in a short period of time.

"Gulf Chemical and Metallurgical Corporation pled guilty today to intentionally discharging pollutants. These actions are not tolerated in Texas, which is reflected by the substantial settlement amount," said Mark Vickery, TCEQ Executive Director. "This conviction, obtained under the TCEQ-Travis County Environmental Prosecutor grant, shows how the TCEQ working with the Travis County District Attorney's Office helps quickly focus resources on investigating and prosecuting environmental crimes."

More than \$2,000,000 of this fine will be deposited in the Travis County general fund. The remainder, \$687,500, will be deposited with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Previously, our environmental attorney recovered another large fine when Heartland Automotive Services, doing business as Jiffy Lube, was convicted of unlawfully dumping pollutants and paid a fine of \$300,000.

"Our natural resources belong to all of us— they are part of our common heritage as Texans. Our water supplies and wildlife habitat are already under pressure, and when they are damaged or destroyed by someone's irresponsible behavior, we all pay the price. Too often, companies like Gulf Chemical have brushed off smaller fines for polluting the environment, considering them just a cost of doing business. That's wrong. We're making sure the penalties for this case fit the crime," said District Attorney Rosemary Lehmborg.

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